

Message Text

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ACTION DHA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 VO-03 CA-01 INSE-00
CIAE-00 DODE-00 SY-05 DEAE-00 L-03 PM-05 SP-02
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 26387

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, VN, TH
SUBJECT: RTG POLICY ON REFUGEE BOAT CASES

REF: BANGKOK 26108

1. DCM, BARNES AND VOLAG REP BORTON MET OCTOBER 31 WITH
MOI DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY CHAMNONG AND REFUGEE OPERA-
TIONS CHIEF GAMON.

2. IN THAT MEETING US OFFICERS REVIEWED CURRENT STATUS
OF OUR REFUGEES OVER COMING TWO MONTHS. THEY EXPLAINED
THAT WE INTENDED TO MOVE OUT OF THAILAND 113 BOAT CASE
REFUGEES IN NEXT WEEK AND THAT IMMIGRATION TEAM IN
PAST WEEK APPROVED CASES INVOLVING SOME 700 PERSONS IN
THE TWO SONGKHLA CAMPS. INS TEAM IS NOW PROCEEDING TO
LAEMSING CAMP, WHERE THEY WOULD EXPECT TO PROCESS AND
APPROVE A SIMILAR NUMBER.

3. BARNES AND BORTON ALSO EXPLAINED THAT WE WILL BEGIN
A MAJOR MOVEMENT OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES OUT OF THE CAMPS.
WE HAVE ASKED THAT VOLAG AGENCIES GIVE PRIORITY TO
EXPEDITING MOVEMENT OF APPROVED CASES AND IN ANY EVENT
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WE EXPECT TO HAVE ALL THE BOAT CASE REFUGEES OUT OF THE
CAMPS, IF NOT OUT OF THAILAND, BY END OF DECEMBER. MADE
CLEAR THAT WHILE WE WOULD TRY TO DO BETTER, WE COULD GIVE
NO COMMITMENT IN TERMS OF BETTERING THIS OBJECTIVE. AT
SAME TIME POINTED OUT THAT OUR OWN EFFORTS AS DESCRIBED
ABOVE, AS WELL AS THIRD COUNTRY MOVEMENT WULD LEAD SOON
TO A SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN THE SONGKHLA CAMP POPULATION.

IN VIEW OF THESE MAJOR EFFORTS, DCM EXPRESSED EXPECTATION THAT RTG WOULD CONTINUE THE PAST POLICY OF ACCEPTING BOAT CASES AND NOT FORCE REFUGEES BACK OUT TO SEA.

4. CHAMNONG AND GAMON WERE DISAPPOINTED THAT WE UNABLE TO MOVE MOST OF APPROVED SONGKHLA CASES TO US IN NEXT TWO TO THREE WEEKS. THEY REITERATED STANDING RTG POSITIONS STRESSING ON HEAVY BURDEN REFUGEES PUTTING ON THAILAND AND GROWING THAI CONCERN OVER FACT THAT BOAT CASE CAMP POPULATION GROWING FASTER THAN US AND OTHER COUNTRIES ARE TAKING THE REFUGEES. THEY URGED THAT WE TAKE STEPS TO EXPEDITE MOVEMENT OF APPROVED REFUGEE CASES. DCM EXPLAINED MAJOR EFFORT WE HAVE MADE IN PROCESSING BOAT CASE REFUGEES AND IN MOVING APPROVED CASES AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO US. ALSO EXPLAINED EFFORTS MADE BY VOLUNTARY AGENCIES TO FIND SPONSORS AND REITERATED THAT WE COULD NOT GIVE ANY PROMISES ON FASTER MOVEMENT THAN OUTLINED PARA 3 ABOVE. HOWEVER, HE INDICATED WE WOULD REPORT RTG CONCERNS TO WASHINGTON. AT THAT POINT CHAMNONG INDICATED THE MINISTRY'S ACCEPTANCE OF OUR PROGRAM AND SATISFACTION WITH OUR EFFORTS. GAMON STRONGLY IMPLIED THAT IF WE WERE ABLE TO "EMPTY THE CAMPS" RTG MIGHT WELL RECONSIDER ITS POLICY OF REFUSING TO ACCEPT SEAWORTHY BOATS.

5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH CLEARLY WANTING US TO MOVE BOAT CASE REFUGEES FASTER, CHAMNONG APPEARED RE-CONFIDENTIAL

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CONCILED, AT LEAST FOR PRESENT, TO OUR SCHEDULE OUTLINED ABOVE. IT WAS OUR IMPRESSION AT MEETING THAT MOI OFFICERS HAD RECEIVED WORD NOT TO CREATE A MAJOR CONFRONTATION ON REFUGEE PROBLEM. WE ARE CONTINUING HOWEVER TO MONITOR SONGKHLA SITUATION CAREFULLY AND WILL CONTINUE TO IMPRESS ON SENIOR MILITARY LEADERSHIP IMPORTANCE OF GENEROUS RTG POLICY WITH REGARD TO REGUEES.

6. AT SAME TIME BELIEVE IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE MOVE AS MANY BOAT CASES AS WE CAN IN COMING WEEKS. WOULD APPRECIATE ANY EFFORTS DEPARTMENT AND VOLAGS CAN MAKE IN THAT REGARD. BELIEVE THAT A MAJOR DECLINE IN BOAT CASE CAMP POPULATIONS, EVEN IF TEMPORARY, WOULD HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON ATTITUDE WITH RESPECT TO REFUGEE POLICY OF THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP AND NEW GOVERNMENT WHEN IT IS INSTALLED.

7. LATEST REPORTS FROM SONGKHLA INDICATE THE ATMOSPHERE IN PROVISIONAL CAMP HAS SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED AND THERE HAS BEEN NO ATTEMPT BY PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS TO FORCE MOVEMENT OUT OF CAMP. AT SAME

TIME CAMP CONDITIONS ARE VERY POOR AND WE ARE
URGING UNHCR TO PRESS FOR IMPROVED TREATMENT OF
REFUGEES BEING KEPT THERE. UNHCR PRESENCE, IN
ADDITION TO US AND AUSTRALIAN CASE
APPROVALS, HAS CONSIDERABLY CALMED THE FEAR OF
REFUGEES IN NEW CAMP. SONGKHLA VIC GOVERNOR ALSO TOLD
EMBASSY REFUGEE OFFICER OCTOBER 30 THAT IF THERE
WERE SUBSTANTIAL DEPARTURES FROM THE OLD CAMP IN THE
NEAR FUTURE HE WOULD MOVE REFUGEES IN FROM
PROVISIONAL CAMP.
WHITEHOUSE

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